UBD DI Chapter 1

I thought that breaking down the components of Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction into axioms and corollaries was extremely helpful in allowing me to understand what the two concepts are all about and how they work together (especially after reading Chapter 9). I did have one specific question arise while reading page 9, however, and it is something that I feel is important to consider when drafting lesson plans and implementing them. In the scenario following Axiom 5, Mr. Axelt provides his students with the same assignment and questions and he differentiates the resources given to the students based on what he knows about their strengths and weaknesses. For example, the text says, “[s]tudents who have a need for support with vocabulary received a key vocabulary list of essential words and clear explanations of the words. Students who need structure in gathering data worked with a graphic organizer designed to help them categorize ideas they found. Mr. Axelt also designated resource materials at various levels of difficulty… Students are generally accustomed to such designations… and generally select resources appropriate for them” (Tomlinson & McTighe, 9). While I understand how this example demonstrates differentiated instruction and I can see how students might benefit from materials and aids that are tailored to their needs and capabilities, I am curious as to how these differing resources are implemented into the classroom in a way that is either confidential or does not make students feel “grouped” in terms of their abilities or lack thereof. In other words, how do teachers effectively prevent segregation that may lead to bullying or self-confidence issues while still using differentiated instruction? This is something that I will want to be aware of in my future classroom as I do not want my students to feel segregated.

UBD DI Chapter 2

The biggest take-away point that I got from this chapter is that it is important to be flexible and adaptable as a teacher. Otherwise, it will be much more difficult to meet the many varying needs of your students. The chapter also made it clear that you can’t always rely on one particular “plan” when it comes to helping a student; you must be open to having a Plan B, Plan C, and so on, as demonstrated in the section about Yana (14). Likewise, teaching requires a great deal of patience. I will have to constantly remind myself that it’s okay if I don’t “get through” to a student immediately, and that just as we expect the students to learn from us as teachers, we also have a lot to learn from them when it comes to their individual learning styles, interests, strengths, weaknesses, personalities, home lives, etc. and that it will take time and dedication to the student in order for us to gain a full understanding of how they best function and what they need from us as educators. I also felt that a lot of what was discussed in this chapter ties into what we’ve been reading and discussing in Dr. Theresa’s course on classroom management. For example, in the story about Noah (15) we learn that he is a kinesthetic learner and that he learns best when he is able to move around. The reading we did for Dr. Theresa (from Classroom Management for Middle and High School Teachers) gave the impression that classroom rules and regulations should be directly stated and enforced with little room for compromise or exceptions. I don’t think that this idea correlates very well with what this chapter is emphasizing, which is the teacher adapting the differing needs of his or her students as opposed to the students adapting to a strict set of rules.

UBD DI Chapter 3

This chapter was a comfort to read because it addresses many of the anxieties I have regarding Common Core Standards and suggests strategies for successfully covering a wide range of content (which is demanded by the standards) through the backward design model. One thing I certainly don’t want to do as a teacher is make a “chronological march through the textbook” (28), because it would be miserable for my students and even miserable for myself (imagine going through the same book year after year!). Fortunately backward design can help to prevent this while still ensuring that I cover all the standards (as long as I do it effectively… I’m sure that I will need to practice it many times before I can master it). And, because I am a “clipboard” learner, I appreciate the structure that the backward design planning template provides. At the same time, however, I was relieved to read that “[b]ackward design does not demand a rigid sequence” (32), meaning that I do not have follow the template in order when I design my units. Too little structure is nerve-wracking to me, but so is too much structure. For these reasons, I feel that backward design will be a very useful tool for me as a future teacher.  
I also found the section on integrating differentiated instruction into the backward design model to be valuable because it acted as a reminder that simply planning for content and for the standards isn’t always enough. I think it’s definitely important to provide more than one form of assessment and that they should be accounted for when designing a unit.

UBD DI Chapter 4

I think the general take-away point from this chapter emphasizes how important it is to get to know your students and to recognize that your job as a teacher is to do your absolute best to guide them towards success. One part that really stood out to me was the scenario about Mrs. Callison and the notes that she takes on her students. Once I got over considering the possibility that my teachers could have taken notes on me (yikes?) and realized that it’s probably more useful than creepy, I thought to myself, but I want to know my students well enough that I don’t need to refer to a notebook. This generated another fear: the likelihood that I will have so many students coming in and out of my classroom on a daily basis that I may not be able to know them as well as I would like to. Not only do I want to know about the different learning styles of my students so that I can best meet their needs, I also want to know about their family, hobbies, and interests because it will help me to make the curriculum more appealing to them (hopefully). I also think that if I know a lot about my students, they might be encouraged to learn more about each other. The more they know about and respect each other, the better the classroom community. So, while I want to be the best teacher I can be, I also have to understand that it’s not going to be an easy task, and that getting to know my students will take a great deal of time and dedication, and maybe even some note taking.

UBD DI Chapter 5

I found this chapter to be especially helpful in allowing me to think about the goals of assessment and how those goals are best met. I will definitely keep the three assessment principles in mind when deciding how I will assess my future students. Because I absolutely loathe the idea of “high stakes” testing (as I’m certain most teachers do), I agree that it is extremely important to “consider photo albums versus snapshots” when it comes to assessment. While I understand that imposition of high stakes tests is sometimes beyond the control of teachers, it is comforting to know that the assessment practices we use within the confines of our own classrooms do not have to follow the model of standardized testing. Since I will be teaching English, I would like to avoid testing as much as possible and still feel that I will be able to readily and accurately assess my students through series of more open-ended and “natural” measures, such as journals, essays, presentations, and observations (this is not to say that such measures would be difficult to use in a math or science classroom, either). Also, when I am teaching a unit, I certainly want to incorporate differing methods of assessment versus relying on the same method over and over again. Not only does using different methods of assessment keep learning more interesting for the students, it also “increases the opportunity for students to work to their strengths” as mentioned on page 63. When deciding which forms of assessments to use at what point in the unit, I will be sure to focus first on the goals of the unit, as stated in assessment principle number two, and to keep in mind that form always follows function, using a successive combination of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments.